

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE – 20 MARCH 2007

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON ATTENDANCE OF PUPILS AT SCHOOLS

Report by Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to invite Elected Members to approve the response to the Scottish Executive consultation document: *Engaged and Involved: Attendance in Scottish Schools*.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The importance of promoting good attendance at school is highlighted by concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children who are not at school. Child protection is of paramount importance and non-attendance at school may indicate a child is at risk.
- 2.2 The Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) has asked for a response to the consultation document, *Engaged and Involved: Attendance in Scottish Schools*. This draft guidance will replace SEED Circular 5/03 and the subsequent Addendum published in September 2003. It draws together advice on good practice and establishes requirements regarding classifying and recording attendance and absence.
- 2.3 The draft guidance provides numerous examples of good practice related to managing attendance and absence, including authorised and unauthorised absence and data recording, promoting attendance, pastoral care and Additional Support for Learning.

3. CURRENT POSITION IN EAST AYRSHIRE

- 3.1 Current practice on attendance and pupil registration in East Ayrshire follows the revised local authority guidelines issued to schools in August 2006, following approval by the Education Committee of the Report on Revised Guidelines on Pupil Registration in Educational Establishments. These guidelines supplement Standard Circular 5: School Attendance and Absence and SEED Circular 5/03 and Addendum.
- 3.2 The consultation document addresses a wide range of factors affecting school attendance, including the issues faced by children with complex lives affected by domestic abuse, substance abuse, mental and emotional distress or caring responsibilities. There is a recognition of the diversity of the school community and the need to be sensitive to the specific needs of minority groups, such as travellers' children or children from some faith groups.

3.3 The consultation document also highlights a range of strategies to promote improved attendance such as breakfast clubs, automated call systems, buddying, peer mentoring, playground supervision, and a more flexible curriculum in secondary schools. All of these approaches have been introduced into schools in East Ayrshire. Further, areas such as positive school ethos and an effective system of personal support and quality pastoral care are already being addressed within East Ayrshire schools.

4. THE CONSULTATION

4.1 East Ayrshire has issued guidance to all establishments for managing attendance and absence which details procedures for pupil registration and non attendance.

4.2 In general, the existing East Ayrshire guidance is in line with *Engaged and Involved: Attendance in Scottish Schools*. Section (2.8) 'Immediate Action when an Absence is Noted' reflects our current procedures. The single area in the document which requires change relates to Section (2.13) Medical and Dental Appointments. It is proposed that the recording code be changed from attendance to authorised absence for this category. However, parents and pupils should continue to be encouraged to arrange appointments as far as possible outwith school hours.

4.3 The submission date for responses to the Scottish Executive was 27 February. East Ayrshire welcomes the proposals contained within this consultation report. East Ayrshire's response is attached as Appendix 1.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Nil.

6. POLICY/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Nil.

7. COMMUNITY PLAN IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The draft guidance on attendance impacts on the themes of Promoting Community Learning, Improving Opportunities and Improving Health.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Any pupil absence from school should be treated seriously and investigated for any potential or real risk to children and young people. All establishments should follow the authority guidelines on these issues.

8.2 A Working Group comprising all interested and relevant parties has previously reviewed the authority's attendance procedures and guidelines. The Working Group is now further revising the procedures to incorporate all necessary and

relevant information into a revised Standard Circular on attendance in all educational establishments. The Education Committee will be informed of the outcomes of the Working Group.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 It is recommended that members:

- (i) Approve the response to the Scottish Executive consultation;
- (ii) Approve the additional requirement relating to medical and dental appointments; and
- (iii) Otherwise, note the contents of this report.

Graham Short
Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

KMcC/JMcC
21 February 2007

List of Background Papers

1. Guidelines for Pupil Registration in Schools and Children Attending Nursery – Education Committee, 8 November 2005.

Members requiring further information should contact John McCarney, Head of Service: Schools Support (01563) 576126 or Kirsteen McCartney, Quality Improvement Officer (01563) 555650

Implementation Officer: John McCarney, Head of Service: Schools Support

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL SERVICES

**RESPONSE TO SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE CONSULTATION ON
DRAFT ATTENDANCE GUIDANCE, “ENGAGED AND INVOLVED: ATTENDANCE
IN SCOTTISH SCHOOLS”.**

1. The document clearly states the purpose and context for the guidelines and gives valuable advice on a wide variety of issues relating to the subject of attendance. Those consulted within the authority welcome the clear and helpful guidelines to assist schools in the management of attendance and absence.
2. The guidelines reflect those recently introduced in East Ayrshire to assist educational establishments in carrying out their duty to promote the safety and well being of children who attend an educational establishment. Thus, we welcome these national guidelines.
3. Section 2.13 on Medical and Dental Appointments is an area not identified in the authority guidelines on registration and attendance. The proposal to introduce a new recording code for these is a welcome addition. However, we would strongly encourage parents and pupils to arrange appointments, as far as possible, outwith school hours and we welcome Executive support for this.
4. In conclusion, the proposals are fully endorsed by East Ayrshire Council’s Department of Educational and Social Services.